



Pacific Northwest Region
Wallowa-Whitman National Forest
1550 Dewey Ave.
Baker City, OR 97814
www.fs.usda.gov/wallowa-whitman

News Release

Contacts: Darcy Weseman (541) 215-2224
Kathryn Gray (541) 523-1246

July 13, 2016

Forest Service announces release of Lower Joseph Creek Restoration Project Final Analysis and draft Decisions

BAKER CITY, Ore. – After more than a year's worth of collaborative work, Wallowa-Whitman Forest Supervisor Tom Montoya announced today that the Lower Joseph Creek Restoration Project Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and two associated draft Records of Decision (ROD) will be released for pre-decisional administrative review on Friday, July 15.

"Collaboration has been an important and valuable part of the development of the FEIS and draft RODs, and this project really strives to provide the greatest balance of resources, while moving this landscape to a more resilient condition," said Tom Montoya, Forest Supervisor.

The Lower Joseph Creek Restoration Project (LJCRP) is expected to increase forest resiliency and reduce uncharacteristic fire and insect outbreaks on more than 98,000 acres. The project will also establish two Research Natural Areas. The LJCRP was designed to encompass a large scale and test new planning processes, learn from successes and mistakes, and adapt. The project area is located 20 miles north of Enterprise on the Wallowa Valley Ranger District of the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest.

The selected alternative blends components from the two action alternatives, and the no action alternative, and includes 17,240 acres of timber harvest activities (which includes 5,400 acres of pre-commercial thinning), six culvert replacements, and maintains 208 miles of open roads. While the draft decision makes no changes to overall road densities within the project area, approximately 17 miles will be opened to provide public access and approximately 14 miles will be closed to address resource concerns.

The project originated from a collaborative watershed assessment completed by the Wallowa County Natural Resources Advisory Committee (NRAC) and external stakeholders.

The collaborative assessment highlighted ecological conditions in need of restoration, and identified potential



for the greatest good

NEWS RELEASE

(continued)

treatment areas. The work on Lower Joseph Creek was an extension of the county's recent collaborative achievement with the Upper Joseph Creek watershed assessment, which laid the foundation for on-the-ground stewardship work in Wallowa County.

To broaden the collaboration on this project, Wallowa County and the NRAC advanced the LJCRP to the Wallowa-Whitman Forest Collaborative. When the dedicated Blue Mountains Restoration Strategy Team was established in 2013 (as part of the Forest Service Regional Forester's effort to increase the pace and scale of forest restoration in the Blue Mountains) the LJCRP was taken on by the team as their first project.

The Wallowa County NRAC worked with the Wallowa-Whitman Forest Collaborative to develop the original proposal for the LJCRP. The Wallowa-Whitman Forest Collaborative contributed to the evolution of the project by determining areas where there was strong social agreement on land management strategies and treatment locations. The collaborative hosted several field trips where the Forest Service demonstrated potential treatment options in the LJCRP. These field trips provided perspective on what the proposed restoration work would look like on the ground.

The planning team also worked closely with the Nez Perce Tribe and received input from others interested in restoration. Input received from the Nez Perce Tribe, NOAA Fisheries, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the collaborative, and the public improved the FEIS and informed the draft RODs. By working closely with a variety of interested parties, the Forest Service was able to balance the need to move the Lower Joseph Creek landscape toward a more resilient condition with current social values around forest management.

"External input was critical in providing us local expertise and helping us understand the different community values," Montoya said. "This project is better because of collaboration. We look forward to continued work with the public and our partners with future land management activities."

More detailed descriptions of the draft decisions, forest restoration and road treatments, and their environmental and socioeconomic effects are described in detail in the FEIS and draft RODs.

The draft ROD for the project is subject to a 45-day objection period. A separate draft ROD calls for establishment of two Research Natural Areas and is subject to a 60-day objection period. Objections to either of the draft decisions will be accepted only from those who have previously submitted specific written comments regarding the proposed project during scoping or the Draft EIS public comment period. The objection period begins the day after the legal notice for the objection process has been published in the newspaper of record (which is the Baker City Herald for the project draft ROD and the Oregonian for the Research Natural Area establishment draft ROD). All of the project documents are available on the website: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/wallowa-whitman/landmanagement/projects/LJCRP>. Copies of

NEWS RELEASE

(continued)

the FEIS and draft RODs (CD or printed) can be obtained by contacting Darcy Weseman at 541-278-3755 or email: deweseman@fs.fed.us.

The Lower Joseph Creek Restoration project is part of the Forest Service's broader strategy to accelerate the pace and scale of forest restoration in eastern Oregon and Washington to provide both healthy forests and healthy communities.

More information can be found on the Eastside Restoration website:

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/EastsideRestoration>.

###